

The Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG): A Model for Success?

**A Monograph
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Abstract

The Korean Military Advisory Group: (KMAC) A Model of Success? by MAJ John D. Tabb, US Army, 45 pages

The United States Army is deeply involved in advisory missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, efforts that have met with mixed success. As the Army searches for new and innovative approaches to the problems of advising indigenous forces, it may be useful to look to the past for models of success. The Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAC) was among the first large-scale advisory missions in US Army history. It conducted its mission during war and peace from its beginning in 1949, through the end of the Korean War in 1953 and beyond.

This monograph asserts that KMAC was successful in building the Army of the Republic of Korea (ROKA) into a force capable of enforcing the government's control of territory and population while also deterring external threats. A case study methodology, utilizing the US Army's DOTMLPF problem-solving construct, will test this assertion. The first section will place the KMAC mission within the context of the conditions that existed following the liberation of Korea in 1945 and leading up to the beginning of the war in 1950. The second section, containing the case study, will analyze the specific measures taken by KMAC during the Korean War to turn the ROKA into an effective fighting force. The intent of this research is not to make specific recommendations for the advisory mission in Afghanistan but, rather, to point out the actions taken by KMAC which led to the success of their mission. Direct parallels between this case and that of Afghanistan are topics of further research.

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Introduction

The Afghan National Army (ANA) was born a decade ago and yet it remains an organization of questionable effectiveness in defeating internal threats to security.¹ The United States-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization training mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) which advises it is far from the first in United States' military history and yet it has failed to apply many of the lessons learned from the past, leaving advisors to relearn them the hard way.² Following the Vietnam War, the United States Special Forces Command became the proponent for advising indigenous forces, yet foreign internal defense remained a doctrinal mission of US conventional forces.³ As the debate continues over how to configure the current force for this mission, it is useful to recall that conventional forces have done the bulk of advising in the past and have done it with great success.⁴

The Korean Military Advisory Group (K MAG) served as a laboratory for many of the issues every subsequent mission of its type has faced.⁵ K MAG also produced some of the first Army doctrine for military assistance. Fifty years on, the fruits of K MAG's

¹ Center for Strategic and International Studies (January 2010), located at <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5javSjJsR1Qf66QHF0jg-tbiVsT4Q> (Accessed January 17, 2010)

² Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "Refighting the Last War: Afghanistan and the Vietnam Template," *Military Review* (November-December 2009):2-13

³ Jeffrey James, "Understanding Contemporary Foreign Internal Defense and Military Advisement: Not Just a Semantic Exercise" (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School for Advanced Military Studies, AY 2008), 10-15

⁴ Robert Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam, and El Salvador* (Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006): 2

⁵ Ibid., 19

efforts speak for themselves: The Army of the Republic of Korea (ROKA), ranked among the best armies in the world.⁶

The NTM-A mission is among the largest efforts of its kind in history, surpassed only by the US advisory effort in Vietnam and by the Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq that continues to operate as part of Operation NEW DAWN. In Afghanistan, transition teams and Observer-Mentor Liaison Teams (OMLT) from numerous NATO member states advise Afghan army and police units from corps down to company-level. To an increasing degree, coalition forces collaborate with these advisor teams to conduct combat operations. Such missions root out a resurgent Taliban and search for the remnants of Al Qaeda along Afghanistan's lawless and inaccessible border with Pakistan. On paper, these efforts represent a tremendous amount of effort. Over 50,000 NATO troops and advisors from 28 member states are operating side-by-side with almost 100,000 Afghan National Army soldiers and nearly as many National Police officers.⁷ Still, the results have not met the commitment of blood, treasure and time.⁸ Eight years on since the establishment of the ANA, the Taliban is growing in strength and influence in the large portions of the country which the central government has been unable to control.⁹

⁶ Global Firepower "World Military Strength", <http://www.globalfirepower.com/> (accessed January 17, 2010) The Republic of Korea's Army is currently ranked twelfth of 42 considered nations.

⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization website "International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Army Troop Strength and Laydown," <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.pdf> (accessed 18 January 2010)

⁸ NATO International Security Assistance Force, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, 30 August 2009, Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense. (Kabul 2009): 1

⁹ Paul Watson, "Behind the Lines with the Taliban" *The Los Angeles Times* (January 11, 2009): 1

Despite such extensive advisory coverage, the Afghan Army remains challenged in its effort to exercise the will of the Afghan government.¹⁰ A number of factors contribute to this deficiency: poor leadership, low pay and a lack of supplies and equipment among others.¹¹ None of these factors are unique among challenges faced by previous advisory efforts.¹²

The primary questions posed by this research is did KMAG successfully accomplish its mission of making the fledgling ROKA into a force capable of securing the country against internal and external threats during the period 1949-1953? A secondary question asks if these early efforts directly lead to the ROKA ultimately becoming a force that was capable of deterring and/or defeating external threats. By analyzing the efforts and accomplishments of KMAG through the current criterion elements of national security capability, this research determined that KMAG was effective in fulfilling its mission and in creating the conditions that would lead to the Republic of Korea Army of today.

The intent of this research is to identify the specific efforts KMAG made to accomplish their mission and to identify those aspects that may assist future efforts. This research will not draw direct correlations between KMAG and any current advisory missions. References to Afghanistan serve only to stimulate further research and to bridge the gap between KMAG and current operations.

¹⁰ NATO International Security Assistance Force, *Commander's Initial Assessment*, 30 August 2009, Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense. (Kabul 2009): p. 2-17

¹¹ RAND National Defense Research Institute, *The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2009), 7

¹² Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 114

Following the fall of Japan and the liberation of the Korean Peninsula, the United States Army began the task of creating a security force for the fledgling Republic of Korea (ROK).¹³ The Provisional Military Advisor Group (PMAG), an ad hoc unit manned by forces already in theater, assumed this mission on 24 August 1948.¹⁴ As the ROK's security forces grew, the US Army identified the need for a more robust and enduring effort to compensate for shortcomings in the areas of manpower and rank structure. The creation of the Korean Military Advisory Group, (KMAG) on 1 July 1949, addressed this need.¹⁵ From the mission's inception, until 25 June 1950 when North Korean forces invaded the south, the PMAG and KMAG missions entailed direct control over the manning, equipping and training of the ROK security forces. The mission's purpose was to build a ROKA capable of population and territorial control.¹⁶

Following liberation, political unrest beset South Korea as its numerous political factions vied for power.¹⁷ In this setting, the US military advisory mission's first task was the creation of a force capable of suppressing the threat posed by political violence, allowing the administration of President Syngman Rhee to exercise control over the newly established ROK.¹⁸ As the threat of forced reunification from Communist North Korea grew, PMAG received a second mandate: the founding of a force capable of

¹³ Robert Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War*, (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1962), 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., 35.

¹⁵ Ibid., 43-45.

¹⁶ Alan Millett, *The War in Korea, 1945-1950: A House Burning*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 172

¹⁷ Ibid., 75

¹⁸ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 9

detering external threats.¹⁹ While events following the North Korean invasion delayed this objective, over time the ROKA would fulfill this goal.²⁰

From the beginning, KMAC faced many of the same limitations that plagued US advisory missions during the Vietnam War and the more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; namely limited funding, manning and training necessary to complete the tasks assigned to it.²¹ Nevertheless, its small corps of officers and non-commissioned officers manned, in some case, by individuals specifically selected for demonstrated excellence in training, was able to develop an effective process for creating the ROKA from scratch.²² By 1950, because of these actions, the ROKA became a force capable of securing the nation against internal threats. The combat experience it gained during the war years of 1950-53 and the greatly expanded efforts of KMAC during this period, served to fulfill the second of KMAC's mandates that was to create a force capable of detering and/or defeating external threats.²³

Nearly sixty years of scholarship informs the body of knowledge and understanding of the Korean War. Most of it is focused on the period of active hostilities, between 1950 and 1953. However, gaps remain, especially concerning the somewhat peripheral efforts to assist the ROK government from the time of South Korea's liberation until its invasion by North Korea. Fortunately, a few well-researched secondary sources can assist in filling in these gaps.

¹⁹ Millet, *The War in Korea*, 190

²⁰ Bryan Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War: The American Advisory Mission From 1946-1953," (PhD Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 2004),4

²¹ Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 112

²² Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 17

²³ Ibid., 18-19

Alfred H. Hausrath's, *The KMAG Advisor: Role and Problems of the Military Advisor in Developing an Indigenous Army for Combat Operations in Korea*, written for the Johns Hopkins University Operational Research Office, presents a highly detailed analysis of the performance of individual KMAG advisors. Hausrath conducted interviews with over two hundred KMAG members who served during the final year of the Korean War.²⁴ The experiences of these advisors who served at regimental-level and below will give this research valuable evidence of the success or failure of KMAG reforms at the lowest levels.

The official US Army account of the Korean War, *U.S. Army in the Korean War*, by Roy Appleman, provides the contextual basis for this study. It provides an excellent analysis of KMAG efforts within the context of the larger political-military setting in Korea during the prewar period as well as during the war itself. Limited as it is to the period of active hostilities, from 1950 to 1953, *US Army in the Korean War* does not discuss the period following Korea's liberation in 1945. The series is particularly useful, however, for its account of ROKA participation in Eighth Army operations and US military efforts to develop it, helping to paint a picture of how it evolved from a poorly led, trained and equipped force at the beginning of the war into the formidable army it had become by 1953.²⁵

The US Army's official account of KMAG, *Military Advisors in Korea: KMAG in Peace and War*, by Robert Sawyer, provides the most detailed account of the organizations origins, its missions, organization and the challenges it faced. Its

²⁴ Alfred H. Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor: Role and Problems of the Military Advisor in Developing an Indigenous Army for Combat Operations in Korea*. (Chevy Chase, MD: Operations Research Office, John's Hopkins University, 1957), 10

²⁵ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 15

comprehensive account of the key initiatives that drove KMAG's success will provide this research with invaluable case study material.

Robert Ramsey's *Advising Indigenous Forces: American Advisors in Korea, Vietnam and El Salvador*, places the KMAG in the context of the broader history of US Army involvement in foreign internal defense. It does this by drawing lessons learned from three US Advisory missions over the last sixty years that have applicability to the current Long War. This analysis will prove useful in identifying the specific measures KMAG employed to overcome its limitations and achieve its objective of building the ROKA. Ramsey writes, "Through hard work, misunderstandings, mistakes, successes, and working together, ROKA had become a large, combat-experienced, and capable military force by 1953."²⁶

The memoirs and official biographies of senior US Army and ROKA leaders provided this research with some needed firsthand accounts and assessments. These works include General Douglas MacArthur's *Reminiscences*, General Omar Bradley's *A General's Life*, General Mark Clark's *From the Danube to the Yalu*, and General Matthew Ridgway's *The Korean War*. Overall, the perspective of these memoirs omits reference to KMAG mission except in passing. This is largely due to their scope, which places the Korean War within the context of an entire career, often-lasting forty years or more and centered on service in World War 2. Still, their perspective was useful in establishing context. This is particularly true in the case of General J. Lawton Collins' memoir, *War in Peacetime: the History and Lessons of Korea*, which provides an excellent primary source of contextual information regarding KMAG. As Army Chief of

²⁶ Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 24

Staff from 1949 until the end of the Korean War, General Collins played a central role in the decision-making that created KMAG and put the ROKA on a course to become what it is today. His insights into the political-military relationships at both the national and the international level paint a clear picture of the factors effecting KMAG at the strategic level.²⁷ Much of Collins' assessments of KMAG center around the incorrect assessments of North Korean forces at the beginning of the war and highlight one area KMAG would clearly have to address to reform itself and the ROKA.

The Will to Win, the biography of General James A. Van Fleet, captures the life and formative experiences of one of KMAG's key enablers. General Van Fleet brought with him to Korea the experience of having advised the post-war Greek Army in their successful counterinsurgency, an experience he applied directly to KMAG.²⁸ *The Will to Win* amply demonstrates how a commitment to the idea of military advising on the part of senior leadership is often the main ingredient for success. Van Fleet's leadership was instrumental to KMAG's reform and this biography highlights it as one of his greatest career accomplishments.

General Paik Sun Yup's memoir, *From Pusan to Panmunjom*, provides an account of the war from the operational level, told from the perspective of a former ROKA division commander and chief of staff from 1953-60. As such, it sheds light on the evolution of the ROKA from a fledgling force, reeling from defeat, to one of the world's most professional and effective fighting forces.²⁹ Of particular interest is the account of operations during 1953, fought largely by the ROKA, to shape and solidify the

²⁷ J. Lawton Collins, *War in Peacetime: The History and Lessons of Korea* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), viii.

²⁸ Braim, *The Will to Win*, 239

²⁹ Paul Braim, *The Will to Win* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 317

gains made in the last year of the war.³⁰ While there is little specific reference to KMAG, its description of the great progress the ROKA made in the three years of the war reflects positively on KMAG's efforts. Paik's leadership was instrumental in implementing KMAG's initiatives and his memoir clearly illustrates the effectiveness of the approach KMAG took after the war began in 1950.

A comprehensive and recent perspective of the interwar years exists in Bruce Cumings' *The Origins of the Korean War* series. These two volumes delve deeply into the history of post-liberation Korea and provide excellent contextual background detail and analysis on the conditions that led up to the outbreak of war in 1950. Cumings' research is thorough and provides an assessment of the war's causes and passes verdicts on its outcome that differ greatly from the official US and South Korean accounts. Among them are indictments of KMAG prewar assessments on ROKA capabilities compared to those of the Communist North. These are valuable for facilitating a balanced analysis of KMAG's performance.³¹

Historian Allan Millet's, *The War For Korea, 1945-1950* and *The Korean War*, provide a powerful counterpoint to the assertions of Cumings, arguing that US efforts are best viewed from the context of a Korean war in which the destinies of North and South Korea were determined by the competing desires of two nationalist movements.³² *The War for Korea*, along with Cumings' earlier work, provides one of only two comprehensive studies of the pre-war years following liberation in 1945. As such, it is a

³⁰ Walter Hermes, *US Army in the Korean War: Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), 477

³¹ Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 495

³² Millett, *The War for Korea*, 2

thoroughly researched and referenced work which places KMAG within the context of the larger political-military struggle to prepare the ROKA for war. Despite a stark contrast between their interpretations of the strategic context of the Korean War, both Cumings and Millett largely agree on their assessment of KMAG's effectiveness in the pre-war years.

In his doctoral dissertation, entitled "Fighting in a Korean War: The American Advisory Missions from 1946-1953", Bryan R. Gibby follows Millett's lead and narrows the focus of Korean War scholarship down to an analysis of the US military advisory effort in detail. Gibby studied under Millett and his work reflects the influence Millett's research had on his assessment of KMAG. His description of the KMAG reform efforts from 1952 to 1953 depicts an organization learning from its mistakes and taking positive action to correct them.

Among recent scholarship on the Korean War, Gregg Brazinsky's *Nation-Building in Korea* stands out as much for its span of the crucial years of 1945 to 1953, the years through which the KMAG mission went from setback to success, as for its presentation of a key aspect of this under-researched period of history. By placing KMAG in context with the US whole of government approach to South Korea, Brazinsky asserts that the success of the mission stemmed from an effort to build a stable South Korean democracy. Of central importance to this thesis is his assertion that the elite corps of ROKA officers cultivated by KMAG would go on to form the bedrock of South Korean society, instilling in it values which mirrored those of the military. Since Korean leadership was so crucial to KMAG's success, understanding this dynamic will provide a

link between KMAG's leadership development efforts and their long-term effects on Korean society and the support it gives to its army.

The methodology used in this research will be a case study analysis, using the elements of the US Army's DOTMLPF (Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership, Personnel and Facilities.) as criteria to assess the transformation of the ROKA from 1949-1953. US Army Field Manual 1, *The Army*, defines the DOTMLPF as "a problem-solving construct for assessing current capabilities and managing change. Change is achieved through a continuous cycle of adaptive innovation, experimentation and experience."³³ The case study contained in this research will use the DOTMLPF to compare the ROKA that existed at its inception in 1949 with the ROKA of 1953. This will determine whether the efforts of KMAG during this period were effective in transforming it into an effective fighting force.

The existing body of literature paints a picture of KMAG as the organization with the greatest challenge of the Korean War. The official histories depict an under-resourced organization led by resourceful and often-brilliant men, placed at the center of events. Senior leaders saw the establishment of an independent ROKA as the key to the survival of the Republic of Korea and the prevention of communist domination on the Korean Peninsula. Their assessments often reflect their personal agenda, as in the case of Van Fleet and Paik, who presided over the successful reforms of KMAG and the ROKA. Nevertheless, all emphasize the strategic importance of KMAG's work. More recent research has produced a more positive assessment of KMAG overall and gives the

³³ US Department of the Army, *Field Manual 1, The Army* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2005)

mission full credit for building the ROKA into an effective force by 1953. Taken as a whole, the sources selected for this research presented KMAG as model for success in war and peace.

This research focused on the activities of KMAG and referred to PMAG only where it was relevant to the context of KMAG's establishment and the precedents KMAG efforts followed. KMAG activities connected to the development of other security forces of the Republic of Korea, such as the Korean National Police (KNP) and the Korean Constabulary fell outside the purview of this research.

Filling the Void

The Korean Military Advisory Group formed in the wake of the liberation of Korea at the end of the Second World War. Despite conflicting historical accounts, this was a period of great uncertainty and instability as the strategy of Rooseveltian internationalism ended, supplanted by the policy of communist containment introduced under President Harry Truman.³⁴ Following liberation, many of the Asian nations occupied by the Japanese were soon to undergo internal upheavals as the dynamics of the new, bipolar world took hold.³⁵ Additionally, US civil administration efforts in these liberated countries were often fraught with incompetence.³⁶ In Korea, for example, the United States Forces in Korea (USAFIK) attempted to establish civil control initially by reinstating the formerly Japanese-run constabulary. This expedient measure resulted in an

³⁴ Wilson Miscamble, *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 307-308

³⁵ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 35-36

³⁶ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 64

acceleration of the faction within Korean society and would eventually lead to a vigorous pro-communist insurgency.³⁷

Realizing its mistake, USAFIK commander, Lt. Gen. John R. Hodge, disbanded all remaining Japanese-built institutions and began work on creating new Korean ones.³⁸ Unfortunately, many former Japanese colonial functionaries remained in their positions, a concession to short-term efficiency that had an enduring negative effect on US-Korean relations.³⁹ As animosity towards the US occupation grew, Hodge began looking for Korean solutions to peacekeeping and law enforcement functions of governance. On 13 November 1945, USAFIK established the Office of National Defense and, under it, the Bureau of Police.⁴⁰ At a stroke, the measure abolished all extra-governmental security apparatus', a large number of which were operating throughout the country, and consolidated all indigenous power under the US military government.⁴¹

One of the chief obstacles in the way of a Korean defense force was the Soviet Union. Following the surrender of Japan, the allied powers split Korea into Soviet and US zones, north and south, at the 38th Parallel. Almost immediately, the two occupying nations began vying for influence over the political destiny of Korea. The Moscow Agreement of 1945, which established a joint commission of US/Soviet trusteeship of the two Koreas, broke down; further dividing the country as hopes of peaceful reunification dwindled.⁴² Following the formal breakdown of the Joint Commission, US efforts

³⁷ Ibid., 85

³⁸ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 9

³⁹ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 78

⁴⁰ Sawyer, *Military Advisors*, 10

⁴¹ Ibid., 10

⁴² Millett, *The War for Korea*, 109

centered on the establishment of an anti-communist Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south, ultimately led by the staunch nationalist Dr. Syngman Rhee. In the north, the Soviet Union established a socialist state; the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) under the leadership of Kim il Sung and rapidly worked to reinforce it.⁴³ Both Rhee and Kim held great political legitimacy for their efforts as staunch opponents of Japanese colonial rule.⁴⁴ This fact, combined with the ideological division between the two Koreas set the stage for the military confrontation between Rhee's nationalist south and Kim's communist north that many saw as inevitable.⁴⁵

The establishment of the ROK Office of National Defense entailed the creation of a 25,000 man national police force and proposed the creation of a Korean national defense force comprised of an army corps, containing three infantry divisions and an air force totaling 45,000 men.⁴⁶ This force was a beginning and a nucleus for future development but it was far from being capable of securing the nation by itself. The political climate at the time made the establishment of such a force infeasible. Tensions between the Soviet-controlled north and the US-controlled south were sensitive to any perception of military buildup on either side. As a result, Washington decision-makers chose to postpone the establishment of the proposed Korean defense force.⁴⁷

Despite this setback, USAFIK continued its effort to establish some form of ROK national defense infrastructure. These efforts took the form of an aggressive recruiting

⁴³ Millet, *The War for Korea*, 76

⁴⁴ Allen Millett, *The Korean War* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2007), 7

⁴⁵ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 135

⁴⁶ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 10

⁴⁷ Ibid., 12

program, aimed at accessing the best officer candidates in South Korean society.⁴⁸ From the start, USAFIK planners identified the need for a US advisory effort to help build Korean national defense capacity.⁴⁹ One of the chief obstacles to the success of such an advisory effort was the language barrier. Korea had so little contact with the western world, let alone the United States, that few Koreans could speak any English. To this end, USAFIK established a language school in the capital city of Seoul to teach Korean officer candidates rudimentary English.⁵⁰ This prepared them for the counterpart relationship they would establish with US military advisors.

With the initial plan to stand up a national defense force put on hold, USAFIK pressed forward with a plan, called BAMBOO, to establish a constabulary police force that would augment the national police. Plan BAMBOO called for the establishment of company-sized elements, assigned to each of the country's eight provinces. Six US advisors, two officers and four enlisted soldiers, advised each company. The plan entailed "growing" eight regiments of constabulary police from this nucleus of eight companies, with the companies doing their own recruiting and training in order to accomplish this.⁵¹ Despite efforts to vet candidates with ties to the Japanese occupation, invariably, the most qualified officer candidates came with experience in the colonial security apparatus. Those who did not were usually veterans of the Nationalist Chinese Army or part of some pre-existing nationalist Korean militia. However, all were uniformly untrained in modern tactics as typified by the US Army.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15

⁴⁹ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 13

⁵⁰ Ramsey, *Advising Indigenous Forces*, 15

⁵¹ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 13

⁵² Ibid., 25

A great step forward for the advisory effort came in the form of US Army Captain James H. Hausman. Captain Hausman came to Korea in 1946 as one of the first Plan BAMBOO advisors. His previous experience had involved a yearlong combat tour in the European Theater of Operations where he served with distinction and suffered wounds. Prior to that, he had served a two-year tour training Women's Army Corps (WAC) enlistees in Iowa and Florida. This unique combination of experiences would prove to be instrumental in preparing him for the monumental task he would face in Korea.⁵³

The advisory group that Hausman joined in 1946 was an organization in crisis, run with limited resources. His mandate from the nascent advisory group's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Russell D. Barros, was to expand and invigorate the constabulary police advisory program.⁵⁴ Peter Clemens writes that, "He dominated the small advisory group, was given carte blanche to implement his ideas, and left indelible changes on what became the South Korean Army."⁵⁵

Efforts to expand the constabulary to its authorized strength of 25,000 men floundered due to growing political unrest and most of the provincial regiments remained at battalion strength or below.⁵⁶ Additionally, advisors on the ground observed great inefficiencies in the national defense bureaucracy, now designated the Department of Internal Security (DIS) due to fears of provoking a negative Soviet reaction to the implication of the words "National Defense."⁵⁷ Showing his commitment to

⁵³ Peter Clemens, "Captain James Hausman, US Army Military Advisor To Korea, 1946-48: The Intelligent Man On The Spot", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.25, No. 1 (March 2002):170

⁵⁴ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 23

⁵⁵ Clemens, "Captain James Hausman," 2

⁵⁶ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 40

⁵⁷ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 20

organizational efficiency, Hausman informed the advisor to the Director of the DIS, Brigadier General William L. Roberts, of his concerns about the awkward relationship between the Department of Internal Security and the constabulary. This arrangement placed the DIS in direct control of the provincial constabulary regiments, bypassing the constabulary headquarters completely. Roberts proved responsive and reacted quickly, curtailing DIS and handing control back to the constabulary headquarters.⁵⁸ Roberts also reformed PMAG by taking measures such as assigning USAFIK personnel with combat experience to adviser duty in order to beef up the organization.⁵⁹

The work of Roberts and Hausman faced its first major challenge on 19 October 1948. Insurgencies had begun to blossom almost immediately in the South following liberation in 1945 but they reached a crisis beginning in 1948 when a pro-communist mutiny of a constabulary regiment on Cheju-Do Island began. Although ROK security forces eventually suppressed that incident, the instability it triggered continued to grow. This culminated with a rebellion that took place in the coastal town of Yosu and soon spread throughout Chollanamdo Province. The rebellion began when a pro-communist group of constabulary mutineers seized the constabulary regimental headquarters in Yosu. The timing could not have been worse. With President Rhee in Tokyo, visiting General Douglas MacArthur, the responsibility for suppressing the rebellion fell to Rhee's subordinates, under the advisement of US Ambassador John Muccio and his military advisory team. With the US occupation officially over and no US troops available, the task of suppressing the rebellion fell entirely to the fledgling constabulary. Fortunately, the close relationship PMAG shared with its senior leadership helped

⁵⁸ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 32

⁵⁹ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 57

prevent disaster. When initial attempts to quell the rebellion by constabulary and Korean National Police (KNP) leadership failed, USAFIK instructed Roberts and his advisors to assist the effort, and take charge of them if necessary, to bring the incident under control.

With Roberts in Seoul advising the acting Commander-in-Chief, ROK Prime Minister Yi Pom-sok and Hausman on the ground in Yosu, the constabulary and the KNP suppressed the rebellion.⁶⁰ Throughout the operation, advisors operated closely with their counterparts at all echelons, providing both advice and combat-multipliers such as transport aircraft and spotter planes.⁶¹ While far from a perfect operation, the suppression of the Yosu rebellion proved that the ROK security forces could handle security at home with good advice.⁶² Peripheral to the action on the ground, the political fallout of the crackdown inflicted significant damage to the reputation of the Rhee government and its security apparatus;⁶³ damage which only time and hard work could undo.

This incident served to highlight the close relationship PMAG enjoyed with the constabulary, largely overcoming factors like language and cultural difference. Following the combat actions of 1948, the advisors of PMAG had a solid appreciation for the challenges the ROKA would face in the future. Among them was a high degree of fratricide caused by a lack of fire discipline as well as an inability to employ indirect fire and to conduct tactical coordination at the company-level and below.⁶⁴ With the specter

⁶⁰ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 166-175

⁶¹ Ibid., 264

⁶² Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 63

⁶³ Ibid., 60

⁶⁴ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 64

of war looming on the horizon, these deficiencies deepened in significance, demanding competent advisors for what would become the ROKA on 15 December 1948.⁶⁵

On 28 April 1949, Ambassador Muccio sent a communiqué to US Secretary of State George C. Marshall, announcing the establishment of KMAG. In it, he praised the efforts of PMAG, stating that it “has contributed significantly to raising the capabilities of the security forces of the Republic of Korea.” He also announced the appointment of Brigadier General William L. Roberts as the first KMAG commander. Muccio’s communiqué also sheds light on the main factor that was driving US efforts at the time: a strong desire to withdraw from Korea and an aversion to becoming unilaterally embroiled in the “Korean problem” of partition.⁶⁶ This political condition would negatively influence KMAG’s ability to improve the ROKA and move it beyond its constabulary roots. As Robert Sawyer writes, “The U.S. Administration was economy minded in the spring of 1950 and was making an effort to cut military expenses in the 1951 fiscal year by reducing special duty groups throughout the world. Thus, in April, the Department of the Army directed General Roberts to prepare a plan for the gradual curtailment of the KMAG.”⁶⁷

Although the US had withdrawn its combat troops and had declared an end to the occupation, US economic involvement in Korea was at an all-time high. Americans saw the growth of the South Korean economy as tied to that of Japan, serving American interests as a bulwark against Soviet expansion. US involvement in Korea, therefore, functioned as a key instrument in the Truman Administration’s policy of containment.

⁶⁵ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 172

⁶⁶ *Secretary of State to the Embassy in Korea, Telegram, 1949*, Foreign Relations of the United States, <http://images.library.wisc.edu/FRUS/EFacs/1949v07p2/M/0411.jpg> (accessed January 26, 2010).

⁶⁷ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 112

This ran counter to the vision most Koreans had in 1949 of a unified, self-determined Korea.⁶⁸ This dichotomy set the stage for war.

The North Korean People's Army (NKPA) already had two full strength infantry divisions and one full strength armor battalion, equipped with the latest variant of the Soviet-made T-34 tank, upon activation in February 1948. By June 1950, the NKPA contained eight full strength motorized divisions and an armored brigade. These forces were combat ready by design and were the product of a concerted effort on the part of the Soviet Union to prepare the People's Republic of North Korea (PRNK) for full-scale war.⁶⁹ The ROKA's readiness level paled in comparison. Nevertheless, the political pressure in the United States against a US buildup of ROKA forces was strong and KMAG reports on the situation in 1950 reflected this.

The Crucible of War

In his book, *Nation-Building in South Korea*, Gregg Brazinsky asserts that, "When the Korean War erupted the Americans had trained a South Korean army of nearly 100,000 men and set up training schools that offered an increasingly thorough and sophisticated military education. But these measures paled in comparison to those undertaken during and after the war."⁷⁰ The failure of the ROKA to defeat the NKPA invasion in June 1950 was the result of political pressures against its further expansion, compounded by flawed intelligence estimates that left it ill prepared and placed it in a

⁶⁸ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 466

⁶⁹ Appleman, *US Army in the Korean War*, 8

⁷⁰ Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation-Building in South Korea* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 78

position it could never have avoided with the best advice.⁷¹ Nevertheless, it was the intervention of KMAG that kept the ROKA from total collapse.

From the establishment of the ROK provisional government and continuing throughout the war, the government of President Syngman Rhee maintained a balance between amicable cooperation with the US and subversion of that cooperation in the name of militant nationalism.⁷² During the summer of 1949, the ROKA, as well as elements of the constabulary and national police engaged in border skirmishes with NKPA forces in a barely veiled effort to provoke a confrontation with the PRNK that the Rhee government saw as inevitable.⁷³

For their part, KMAG advisors in the field were reporting the deteriorating situation clearly.⁷⁴ Their official reports on ROKA unit disposition reflected the poor state of readiness throughout the ROKA.⁷⁵ However, their commander, Brigadier General William L. Roberts, was decidedly more sanguine.⁷⁶ Within KMAG, his command messaging reflected optimism in the ROKA ability to repel an invasion from the north; his assessment to the Army Staff, while less optimistic, continued to paint an unjustifiably rosy picture. In it, he stated, “If South Korea were attacked today by the inferior ground forces of North Korea, plus their Air Corps, I feel that South Korea would take a bloody nose.”⁷⁷ The US Embassy, meanwhile, was even more upbeat and even

⁷¹ Sheila Jager, “Iraqi Security Forces and the Lessons from Korea.” *Strategic Studies Institute Editorial* (December 2006), 212

⁷² *Ibid.*, 212

⁷³ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 388

⁷⁴ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 240

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 241, 251

⁷⁶ Appleman, *United States Army in Korea*, 18

⁷⁷ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 249

generated a report that asserted that the ROKA could defeat any invasion from the North. Finally, on 20 June 1949, during a visit of senior military leadership to Korea, Roberts reported to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley and Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins that the ROKA was “the best doggone shooting army outside of the United States” thus the misperception of ROKA readiness was sealed.⁷⁸

The failure of the ROKA during the NKPA invasion of 25 June 1950 was complete. Roy Appleman writes “Of 98,000 men in the ROK Army on 25 June the Army headquarters could account for only 22,000 south of the Han at the end of the month.”⁷⁹ The constabulary-based ROKA had been completely outmatched by the offensively – oriented NKPA. The almost total withdrawal of US combat troops over the previous five years left them with no means of reinforcement. Far East Command responded to the invasion by launching air and naval attacks against North Korean attack aircraft and torpedo boats but ground support was too late in coming to stop the NKPA from seizing the capitol of Seoul and crossing the last strategic frontier in the south at the Han River.⁸⁰ At the time of the invasion, some KMAC advisors remained with their counterparts despite a general evacuation of remaining US forces. Many of these advisors found themselves organizing the retreat of ROKA units, often while in contact with enemy forces.⁸¹ These men also became the only link between the ROKA and Far East Command where MacArthur desperately tried to contain the situation through his

⁷⁸ Millet, *The War for Korea*, 251

⁷⁹ Appleman, *US Army in the Korean War*, 35

⁸⁰ Ibid., 49-53

⁸¹ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 118

command messages. It was these messages, communicated by KMAG advisors to the ROKA, which persuaded its leadership to halt their retreat, buying time for an American counterstroke.⁸²

During the remainder of 1950 and into 1951, KMAG advisors exercised direct control over their counterparts in the ROKA in a desperate effort to consolidate and reorganize it in support of Eighth Army's effort to halt the NKPA. In many instances, they had to lead ROKA units in combat until they could establish effective Korean command structures.⁸³ KMAG would not be able to begin the task of rebuilding the ROKA until the fall of 1950 when they received authorization to begin increasing the ROKA end strength.⁸⁴

From the beginning, KMAG faced a dilemma. In the ROKA soldiers, they had willing and receptive counterparts. In the ROK government, they had a highly popular and aggressively militant organ of national power forging a culture of economic and political determinism. All the ROKA needed was the manning, equipment, training and experience to grow it into a world-class force, things the United States government had no intention of providing before June 1950. The war changed everything and provided all three of these elements in abundance and KMAG would be their conduit. In July 1951, a year into the war and with fighting stabilized at the 38th Parallel, the Department of the Army ordered Eighth Army Commander, General Matthew Ridgway to give his recommendations for ROKA reform. His assessments, covering all aspects of the

⁸² Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 125

⁸³ Ibid., 143

⁸⁴ Ibid., 146

DOTMLPF, would provide the direction KMAG needed to achieve its miracle. In his assessment, Ridgway detailed the following requirements:

The establishment of a replacement training and school command.
(Doctrine and Organization)

An increase in the number of US Army personnel at ROKA training installations. (Training)

A rehabilitation program for all ROKA divisions. (Training)

An increase in the number of automatic weapons, artillery, and tanks in the ROKA, as units demonstrated an ability to employ such systems.
(Materiel)

An intensive leadership program for the ROKA. (Leadership)

Pressure on the ROK government to ensure disciplinary measures against incompetent, corrupt or cowardly ROK officers and government officials.
(Personnel)

The development of service units for a ten-division ROKA. (Personnel)

The establishment of a U.S. Army-type military reservation and a centralization of ROKA training installations. (Facilities)⁸⁵

The key to implementing these reforms would be strong leadership in the form of Lieutenant General James Van Fleet who took command of Eighth Army following General Ridgway's elevation to Far East Command and Supreme Allied Commander on 11 April 1951. Van Fleet came into position uniquely qualified to build the ROKA into an effective fighting force. Prior to his arrival, Van Fleet had commanded the US Army Military Group – Greece, which had the mission of training and equipping the Greek military during the Greek Civil War from 1948-49.⁸⁶ His successful efforts in Greece

⁸⁵ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 176

⁸⁶ Braim, *The Will to Win*, 161

were a testament to his ability to coordinate the disparate efforts of the national government, the US country team and the US Military Mission. Of particular relevance was his involvement with the Joint US Military Advisory and Planning Group, (JUSMAPG) an interagency effort under the control of the Ambassador, which would greatly inform his actions concerning the ROKA. Unlike his predecessor, Van Fleet found common ground with President Rhee. Like Rhee, he was committed to building the ROKA into a force, not only capable of defending South Korea but also capable of defeating the communist north and reunifying the country.⁸⁷

Instrumental to Van Fleet's vision was new leadership in KMAG. Shortly after taking command, Van Fleet replaced KMAG commander, Brigadier General Francis Farrell, with Brigadier General Cornelius Ryan.⁸⁸ The decision was controversial. Under Farrell, KMAG had made great strides but Farrell had to learn his job on the fly. Originally sent to Korea to command a division field artillery unit, Farrell took command of KMAG despite having no experience with training at senior levels.⁸⁹ With Ryan, Van Fleet had the master trainer he needed. Ryan had previously commanded the 101st Airborne (Training) at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, where he earned renown for doing more with less when it came to training.⁹⁰ Van Fleet's mandate to Ryan entailed two components: Transform the ROKA into a fighting force capable of carrying its weight in Eighth Army and make KMAG responsive to the needs of the ROKA.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Braim, *The Will to Win*, 272

⁸⁸ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 189

⁸⁹ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 138

⁹⁰ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 189

⁹¹ Ibid., 190

Forging the Sword

Doctrine

A key first step in reforming the ROKA was the selection of a doctrine for use in operations and training. It needed to be basic enough to bring the mass of the ROKA up to a standard but flexible enough to allow soldiers who had already received constabulary training to progress without having to submit to basic training again. The US Army's Mobilization Training Plan (MTP) 7-1 had been the primary training document for KMAC since 1949 and it would continue in use until the ROKA could develop its own doctrine.⁹² Written in 1943, it was the foundational training doctrine for infantry regiments during preparations for the invasions of Europe and the island-hopping offensives of the Pacific. Its uncomplicated program of instruction (POI), from the individual soldier to regimental command post level, made it ideal for the kind of streamlined training management program that KMAC advisors knew would simplify training the ROKA.⁹³ Following the outbreak of war in 1950, it became obvious that the ROKA had yet to grasp the key concept contained in the US doctrine of the period: Combined arms operations. ROKA corps and division in contact came under criticism for not implementing the US doctrine taught by KMAC since 1949.⁹⁴

While KMAC relied on the same training doctrine in use before the war, during the reformation under Ryan, there was great effort made to make that doctrine more coherent to Korean officers. Subsequently, KMAC translated US doctrine into the

⁹² Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 70

⁹³ Ibid., 70

⁹⁴ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 146

Korean language. Before the war, a great deal of time had been devoted to conducting lectures and demonstrations of task, conditions and standards through a translator. These additional steps took time away from the far more important practical exercises that were the core of training.⁹⁵ Additionally, by providing Korean officers with a Korean language set of doctrinal manuals, advisors could more quickly discern good officers from bad by observing their leadership and management skills on an even playing field.

Organization

The ROKA divisions that existed at the beginning of the war were merely an expansion of the constabulary police force established in 1946 rather than a dedicated combat force.⁹⁶ Their organization, based on a heavily modified US Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E), gave them sufficient strength to conduct the counterinsurgency operations (COIN) which characterized the pre-war years but left them completely unprepared to repulse the attack of their far more offensive-oriented counterparts to the north.⁹⁷ It would take the hard lessons of 1950-51, when ROKA divisions dissolved in the face of the NKPA invasion, to remedy the situation.⁹⁸ In August 1950, General MacArthur gave USAFIK approval to expand the ROKA to any level that General Walton Walker, then-Eighth Army commander, determined was “advisable and practicable”. This expansion came with a reorganization based on the deficiencies seen in the constabulary-based ROKA divisions. This reorganization

⁹⁵ Gibby, “Fighting in a Korean War,” 196

⁹⁶ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 11

⁹⁷ Appleman, *United States Army in Korea*, 17

⁹⁸ Ibid., 34-35

involved the use of the Tables of Distribution and Allowance (TDA) for a US Army division from 1942.⁹⁹

Among the reforms brought about by Ryan was a restructuring of KMAG to make it more in line with the structure of the ROKA. This involved the addition of two deputy commanders, one to handle replacement training and schools and the other responsible for a new organization called the Field Training Command (FTC).¹⁰⁰ This served to free Ryan up to work more closely with his counterpart and to view emergent trends from a more elevated perspective.

Training

The ROKA that KMAG inherited in 1948 was virtually a clean slate. Initial inspections of units found that most had only a rudimentary foundation in basic soldier skills like marksmanship. What they lacked in training, however, they made up for in intense nationalistic zeal. One US advisor remarked that the ROKA of 1949 “could have been the American Army of 1775.”¹⁰¹

After the war began, however, KMAG aggressively developed its training program. The centerpiece of this effort was the Division Rehabilitation Program. The program pulled divisions from the line, refitting, and retraining them for four weeks. A centerpiece of the retraining program was its integration of emerging tactics, techniques and procedures. An excerpt from the KMAG Handbook, dated 1951 explains this process.

⁹⁹ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 146

¹⁰⁰ Gibby, “Fighting in a Korean War”, 212

¹⁰¹ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 69

As appropriate, this headquarters will publish training directives, memorandums and circulars pertaining to training within the division area. These publications are designed to take maximum benefit of the information gained from enemy tactics and the lessons learned from successful friendly operations against the enemy. Field advisors should make every effort to ensure that these training publications are implemented with maximum efficiency.¹⁰²

As conditions in the war began to stabilize along the 38th Parallel, a renewed interest in improving the effectiveness of the ROKA began to assert itself among top US officials.¹⁰³ US military leaders acknowledged that the ROKA was “the most critical link in the defense chain.”¹⁰⁴ The first step in this direction involved improvements to the school and training system, established before the war by KMAC but insufficient to the task of fielding an ever larger and more capable ROKA. Staffing authorizations for the US Army-run Replacement Training and School Command increased and the infantry, field artillery and signal schools consolidated at Kwangju in Southwest Korea. This new facility, called the Korean Army Training Center, (KATC) provided the capacity to handle up to 15,000 troops. The ROKA officer candidate course (OCS), modeled after the US OCS program, was increased in length from eighteen to twenty-four weeks and a Korean Military Academy was established near Pusan, patterned after West Point, with a full, four year curriculum. Finally, a Command and General Staff School, modeled after the US Army Command and Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, was established at Taegu, providing vital field-grade officers for the ever-multiplying battalions and brigades in combat. Additionally, the number of Korean officers sent to US Army schools increased

¹⁰² Eighth U.S. Army, *KMAC Handbook*, Eighth Army Publishing Directorate, 1953

¹⁰³ Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 208

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 207

to 250, providing a much-needed immersion in US doctrine, training techniques, military culture and language.¹⁰⁵

All of these measures addressed grave shortcomings in the competence of ROKA officers, most of whom entered service with little more training than that of a private.¹⁰⁶ The expansion of the Officer Training School and the Korean Military Academy sought to remedy this by modeling its POI on the US leadership development model. Officer candidates were passed through a complex “sink works” of training programs and processing organizations optimized to produce the best company-grade officers possible. This program produced a corps of junior officers that had twice as much formal training as its pre-war counterpart did.¹⁰⁷ The training of low-density occupational specialties like quartermaster, transportation, medical and intelligence received special attention. This emphasis alone went a long way towards giving the ROKA its autonomy as it relieved the KMAC advisors of doing many of the ROKA support functions themselves, preventing an unhealthy dependency.¹⁰⁸ Also greatly enhanced was the initial-entry program, consolidated at the Korean Army Training Center (KATC) in November 1951. By combining all of the ROKA training facilities, logistics were streamlined and greater space was made available for training combined arms formations; something which had been impossible at the previous, distributed locations.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 210

¹⁰⁶ Gibby, “Fighting in a Korean War,” 197

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 199, The officer procurement “sinkworks” was a system wherein promising officer candidates, drawn from units in the field, replacement training centers (RTC) or Army Service Units (ACU) “flowed” to an Infantry-centric Officer Candidate School (OCS) program for a fourteen-week common training program. This pool was then “poured” into branch-specific training programs, which converged into replacement battalions to be dispensed into units.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 200

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 207

The second pillar of the reformed training program under Ryan was the new Field Training Command (FTC). The creation of the FTC came from the need for dedicated collective training program for ROKA divisions that replaced the ineffective stay-in-place program espoused by the previous KMAG command team. A slower operational tempo in the summer of 1951 gave this program its window of opportunity. The program involved a two-month remedial training program, during which time the division left the front line and relocated to a regional training center near its area of operation. There it went through a three-phased program. Phase 1 involved a weeklong rest and refit period during which KMAG advisors assisted the ROK staffs in coordinating logistics, developing training schedules and issuing orders to subordinate headquarters. Phase 2 was a six-week individual training block during which the division's soldiers underwent basic marksmanship refresher training as well as common and military occupation specific skills training. Over the course of the six weeks, the training would become collective, culminating in platoon and company level exercises. The third and final phase involved full-scale battalion exercises as well as regimental and division-level command post exercises; this was tough, realistic training with thirty percent conducted at night. Combat support and service support received concurrent training under the same conditions as infantry units.¹¹⁰ The product of this program was a division that could not just return to the fight and perform well in combat but one that could train itself and prepare for war in a garrison environment as well.

¹¹⁰ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 214

Materiel

A central aspect of the KMAG approach to advising was a philosophy of “self help” which permeated all counterpart interactions, particularly in the realm of logistics. While this may have been a natural and unintended consequence of the scale of the KMAG operation, it nevertheless dovetailed well with the growing desire for autonomy on the part of the South Korean people in general and ROKA soldiers in particular. Some perceived cultural traits such as a lack of initiative, an inability to foresee events and to conduct forecasting and planning frustrated KMAG advisors’ efforts to engender a culture of self-sufficiency.¹¹¹

As in the case of training, where the ingenuity of individual advisors made up for limitations in resources, so too would advisor initiative function as the primary means of meeting the ROKA materiel needs. One of the glaring deficiencies identified by KMAG during the early phases of the war was the lack of integrated artillery support to the ROKA infantry battalions and brigades.¹¹² Reports from KMAG advisors in the field indicated that the lack of integrated, direct support artillery at the corps and division-level was one of the primary obstacles to ROKA combat effectiveness. Major Eldon Anderson, a regimental artillery advisor with the ROK I Corps reported that “The ROK’s would have liked to have had more organic firepower all the time. They knew that was one of the things that was holding them back but, for various reasons, Eighth Army did not approve any increase in artillery: One reason being that they didn’t have enough artillery

¹¹¹ Brazinsky, *Nation-Building in South Korea*, 111

¹¹² Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 213

to go around the American divisions and the Korean Army, and another being the lack of other types of equipment such as trucks and signal equipment.”¹¹³

With the war growing longer and becoming increasingly a positional battle of attrition, USAFIK decided in September 1951 to activate four 155-mm howitzer battalions. By November, they stood up an additional three headquarters batteries and six 105-mm. howitzer batteries. Once the expansion was complete, each of the ten ROKA divisions has three 105-mm. and one 155-mm. battalions organic to it.¹¹⁴

In terms of equipment, the ROKA in 1950 paled in comparison to its opposite number in the north. While the Soviets equipped the NKPA with their latest T-34/85 tanks and their finest field artillery pieces, the US supplied the ROKA with out-dated and inferior equipment. An American government intent on cutting costs and maintaining emphasis on reconstruction efforts in Europe rejected repeated appeals from the US Embassy and the ROK government for more and better equipment.¹¹⁵ The outbreak of war would change this dynamic just as it did everything else. In Van Fleet, President Rhee had a real partner who would work hard to get the ROKA what it needed to match the NKPA.¹¹⁶ General Mark Clark’s replacement of Ridgway at Far East Command forged the final link in the chain for reequipping the ROKA.¹¹⁷ When the ROKA authorization finally expanded beyond the ten-division limit insisted on by Ridgway,

¹¹³ Debriefing Report, No.76, MAJ Eldon B. Anderson, *Korean Military Advisory Group, 10 Nov 50-14 Dec 51, Artillery Advisor to the 9th ROK Division* (Department of Training Publications and Aids, US Army Artillery School, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, 1952), 2.

¹¹⁴ Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 214

¹¹⁵ Millett, *The War for Korea*, 217

¹¹⁶ Braim, *The Will to Win*, 310

¹¹⁷ Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 340

there was a corresponding increase in the number of armor battalions and direct support artillery units.

The increase in the quality and quantity of equipment and supplies the ROKA received from the US came with a corresponding emphasis on resource stewardship on the part of KMAC. In his report on KMAC operations, Alfred Hausrath writes “KMAC advisors had to keep on the alert for the overrequisitioning of supplies and had to check on the use of supplies.”¹¹⁸ Black marketeering and misuse of equipment was an endemic problem in the ROKA and KMAC received very little official guidance on how to deal with it. As in so many cases, what actions to take fell to the judgment of the individual advisor, based on the level of rapport he had established with his counterpart. One KMAC advisor Hausrath interviewed said, “you can’t be too tough about clamping down on the requisitions because if they don’t have the stuff – even if they don’t have it because they sell it – it may mean the advisor’s life in an attack.”¹¹⁹

Leadership

The KMAC task organization was a perfect mirror of its ROKA counterpart. At least in theory, it provided an advisor to every commander down to regimental level and battalion level in mounted maneuver and combat support units.¹²⁰ This structure facilitated a streamlined command and control relationship that KMAC took advantage of to manage the development of senior leaders and their staffs. Van Fleet saw the greatest weakness of the ROKA as being its leadership. Like every other aspect of it, the

¹¹⁸ Hausrath, *The KMAC Advisor*, 67

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 78

¹²⁰ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 58

ROKA's leadership was ad hoc and rapidly promoted junior leaders, often in their twenties, filled critical vacancies in divisions and corps. Van Fleet saw their lack of experience as the reason behind their substandard performance in 1950-51.¹²¹ To remedy the situation, Van Fleet began to work directly with KMAG. Under Ridgway, KMAG grew to two thousand personnel but it still suffered from the inexperience of its officers and from the perception of advisor duty as dangerous and thankless. Van Fleet sought to remedy this situation by directing that only the best replacement officers serve with KMAG and that the most combat-hardened Eighth Army veterans receive priority of assignment with the mission.¹²²

On 23 June 1952, the Soviet Union expressed its willingness to support truce negotiations between the two Koreas. While not ending the war, this overture bought Eighth Army time and space to consolidate its position and focus effort on preparing the Korean military to take over the defense of its country.¹²³ As the combined effects of combat experience and intensified training began to take hold in the first few years of the conflict, a new dynamic began to emerge. Young Korean officers, with leadership skills forged in combat, were increasingly becoming the key enablers of ROKA combat success. Among these, two stood out: Lee Chong-chan and Paik Sun-Yup. Both of whom would serve as ROKA Chief of Staff.¹²⁴

The effect of the new leadership and direction provided by Van Fleet and Ryan cannot be underestimated. As Bryan Gibby writes in *Fighting in a Korean War*, "Both

¹²¹ Braim, *The Will to Win*, 272

¹²² Ibid., 273

¹²³ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 185

¹²⁴ Ibid., 188

KMAG and the ROKA responded to Van Fleet's leadership. The qualitative improvement in both organizations had profound effects on the fighting capability of Eighth Army – capabilities that would be seriously tested in the fall of 1952.”¹²⁵ Understandably, the prewar advisory effort contended with restrictions that limited their ability to discriminate between good officer candidates and bad. Under Ryan, however, the goal was production of both quality and quantity.

Part of the KMAG reform effort of 1952 involved the rapid integration of Koreans into all aspects of operations previously handled by KMAG advisors. Specifically, this included training, administrative and support functions that advisors had performed in order to allocate more personnel to combat units. Under Ryan, these functions were seen as just as vital to ROKA operations as combat and, in most cases, were more technical and difficult to train. Most importantly, handing all functions over to the Koreans was the key to their self-sufficiency and that would enable the envisioned US withdrawal.

Perhaps the most enduring outcome of the KMAG training program was the effect it had on ROKA leadership. As Gregg Brazinsky writes, “American training programs helped forge elite officers with a strong sense of public responsibility and an ardent faith in their ability to lead.”¹²⁶ These qualities would ensure that the ROKA officer corps would become a professional organization. An unintended consequence of ROKA officer competence in later years would be their virtual takeover of the government. This development was more of a reflection of the confidence and respect the ROKA had

¹²⁵ Gibby, “Fighting in a Korean War,” 188

¹²⁶ Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 71

gained in the eyes of the Korean people than it was of any kind of breakdown in civil-military relations.¹²⁷

Personnel

The invasion of the NKPA had been a shock to the system and the most glaring deficiency it highlighted was the lack of organized and equipped divisions within the ROKA. Manpower was not the issue: more than enough young men were volunteering for ROKA service and many went directly into units already in the field.¹²⁸ The largest obstacle was the continuing resistance to expansion USAFIK and the embassy were encountering from Far East Command and General MacArthur. MacArthur's staff had released the results of a study on 17 July 1950 that estimated that the ROK was capable of fielding only four full-strength divisions for its army. Then USAFIK commander, Walton Walker and Ambassador Muccio strongly disagreed with the report's findings and urged for the removal of pre-war limitations on ROKA expansion. This appeal had the desired effect and the rapid expansion of the ROKA began on 9 August 1950.¹²⁹

As new ROKA divisions grew, a new program that bears note began. As preparations for offensive operations to retake Korea from the NKPA began, it became apparent that US combat divisions were severely under-strength due to attrition. In response, MacArthur ordered the assignment of 500 out of the 2,950 ROK replacements, which were leaving the regional training centers (RTC) daily, to US units in contact.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea*, 92

¹²⁸ Sawyer, *Military Advisors in Korea*, 143

¹²⁹ Ibid., 144-146

¹³⁰ Ibid., 149-150

This program – the Korean Augmentation to the US Army (KATUSA) – would endure beyond the armistice and form the foundation of US/ROK relations in the decades to come.¹³¹

In the midst of these positive steps raged a bitter debate over the ultimate size of the ROKA. A memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), submitted to the Secretary of Defense in January 1952, recommended that the ROKA remain at the earlier agreed upon 250,000-man strength, organized into ten divisions. This recommendation stemmed largely from an estimate of the Korean economy's ability to sustain future growth of the Army. Nevertheless, the JCS recommendation faced opposition on the part of President Rhee and from within the ranks of the US military itself. As Walter Hermes write, "The ROK Government and its most effective spokesman, President Rhee, did not, of course, agree that an army of ten divisions would be enough to defend South Korea in the postwar period, but the matter lay quiescent until late March 1952. During an inspection trip to Korea, Secretary of the Navy Dan Kimball discovered that General Van Fleet favored the formation of ten additional ROK divisions. When he reported this item to the Army Policy Council, upon his return, there was considerable consternation." Nevertheless, General Ridgway and the JCS prevailed and made the decision to stick with the initial figure.¹³²

¹³¹ "The objective of the KATUSA Soldier Program is to augment U.S. forces with ROK Army soldiers in order to increase the ROK/U.S. combined defense capability on the Korean peninsula. The KATUSA Soldier Program is significant because of not only the military manpower and monetary savings that it provides to the U.S. Army, but also because it represents ROK/U.S. cooperation and commitment to deter war. The KATUSA Soldier Program is also symbolic of ROK/U.S. friendship and mutual support." *Global Security: Eighth US Army*. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/8army.htm> (accessed 5 February 2010)

¹³² Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 211

In early 1952, the ROKA was still a long way from having an army of ten fully fielded divisions. Efforts were moving with a full head of steam, however, with plans for completion by the end of 1952.¹³³ Despite their opposition to an increase in the number of combat divisions, Far East Command and the JCS did affect an increase in the number of authorizations to the ROKA Service Corps, bringing their total to 60,000 with a goal of 75,000 in the future. This step greatly improved the command and control of the support corps, enhancing the support they provided to units in combat.¹³⁴ The cap on ROKA growth was finally broken in May 1952 when General Mark Clark succeeded Ridgway as commander of the United Nations Command. Clark, like Van Fleet, supported a larger ROKA that would be strong enough to defeat the North Korean People's Army and maintain peace on the peninsula.¹³⁵

One of the greatest challenges to the US Army advisory mission, since the beginning, had been the induction and reception process for new personnel. A major flaw in the system prior to reform involved the evaluation of potential recruits at the local level. Under this system, recruits came from the countryside and quickly shipped, often without food or shelter, to the Regional Training Center (RTC). There they received their first physical and mental screening. Because of the lack of prescreening and because of the conditions of their transportation, up to 25% of inductees who arrived at the RTC were unfit for duty and 35% of them tested positive for tuberculosis.¹³⁶

¹³³ Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 212

¹³⁴ Ibid., 213

¹³⁵ Ibid., 340

¹³⁶ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 210

Illiteracy was another obstacle. Although Korean society valued education, most of the population in the South was agrarian and largely uneducated. Too pervasive to prohibit induction, illiteracy nevertheless was a serious obstacle to training. KMAC advisers adapted to this reality by developing a system of visual training aids that conveyed the tasks, conditions and standards for training without the need of written material.¹³⁷

Once in command, Ryan made rapport building a priority between KMAC advisers and their counterpart. Ryan led by example by accompanying his counterpart, the ROKA Chief of Staff, everywhere he went. Done at all echelons, this had the effect of improving morale and raising esprit de corps in both Korean and US soldiers. Correspondingly, this renewed emphasis on partnership did much to increase the prestige of KMAC in the eyes of the Koreans.¹³⁸ Coinciding with these steps to increase ROKA capacity was a corresponding increase in the KMAC end strength, which increased by 800 men to 1,800 in December 1951.¹³⁹ This positive step allowed KMAC to staff its schools while maintaining an advisory presence in the field.¹⁴⁰ Although it never achieved the manning level its commanders wished for, KMAC made the most of what it had and never let its shortfalls stand in the way of mission accomplishment.

As the relationship between advisor and advisee began to grow, more and more often, ROKA officers took the initiative to improve their organization in uniquely Korean ways. No Korean military leader did more in this regard than General Paik Sun Yup did.

¹³⁷ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 41

¹³⁸ Ibid., 191

¹³⁹ Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 213

¹⁴⁰ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War", 193

As ROKA Chief of Staff, Paik was instrumental in the design of the ROKA's training facilities, including the First and Second Recruit Training Centers (RTC) at Cheju and Nonsan, which processed new personnel into the ROKA. Among the challenges Paik faced in this capacity was a ration crisis that made headlines in the United States in January 1953 and the uniquely Korean crisis of "transplant bedding".¹⁴¹

The ration crisis came about because of media reports in the United States that ROKA soldiers were eating worse than prisoners of war did. When asked about the issue by the US government, the ROK government claimed that it was unable to feed its soldiers adequately. At Far East Command, General Mark Clark suspected that the reports were a ploy by the ROK government to gain greater US support.¹⁴² Caught in the middle were Paik and KMAG, led by Ryan. The solution to the crisis reflected the typical nuanced approach KMAG took to all issues where there was a risk of dependency. While the US supplied a temporary supply of basic foodstuffs, KMAG advised the ROKA on the creation of a central procurement agency, modeled on that of the US Army. After a rocky start, the ROKA established an effective, indigenous procurement capability that drew its produce from the Korean economy.¹⁴³

A second order effect of ROKA service on the Korean economy came in the form of a social crisis observed by Paik at the RTC. Because South Korea was largely an agricultural society, social security came in the form of sons who could till land, supporting their parents and grandparents. The guarantee of successive generations of sons was a critical component of this system which wartime service put in jeopardy.

¹⁴¹ Paik Sun Yup, *From Pusan to Panmunjom*, (McLean: Brassey's, 1992), 211

¹⁴² Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 439

¹⁴³ Paik, *From Pusan*, 209

Subsequently, Korean parents often discouraged military service for their sons until they had fathered male offspring. While inspecting ROKA recruit training facilities, Paik observed lines of families waiting with young women in tow – intended daughters-in-law – determined to conduct what is known in Korean society as “transplant bedding” in order to secure offspring. Initially, the practice horrified the military sensibilities of Paik and his KMAG advisors but Paik’s knowledge of Korean culture and traditions prevailed and the practice became institutionalized.¹⁴⁴

The quality of advisors in KMAG improved under Ryan as well. He insisted that advisors have combat experience at the level they were to advise but did not discriminate against reservists, who formed the majority of KMAG replacements. In his view, the mixture of military and civilian experience was conducive to the demands of the advisory mission.¹⁴⁵ In order to combat the perception that advisory duty was second-rate, successful Eighth Army battalion and regimental commanders became advisors. While this step met with considerable protest, there was an effort to acknowledge the significant contribution, sometimes greater than the one they made in their command billet, these individuals made while advising ROKA divisions and corps.¹⁴⁶ This assignment tradition, begun under Van Fleet and Ryan, did not end with their departure. Van Fleet’s successor, General Maxwell Taylor continued it. General Paik writes, “General Taylor didn’t leave the appointment of corps-level advisors strictly in KMAG’s hands. He insisted that he play a role, and his conviction was that only senior colonels, who had finished regimental

¹⁴⁴ Paik, *From Pusan*, 11, The expression “transplant bedding” comes from the ancient Korean cultivation technique of planting dense rows of rice in beds in order to grow seedlings for later transplant to flooded paddies. In this instance, the practice was applicable for allowing young men in the ROKA to fulfill their filial obligation.

¹⁴⁵ Gibby, “Fighting in a Korean War,” 192

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 193

command in the US Army, could be candidates...General Taylor's rule of thumb was, "don't send anybody who isn't general officer material."¹⁴⁷

Facilities

The centerpiece of the revamped ROKA improvement program undertaken by Van Fleet and Ryan was the Korean Army Training Center (KATC). This new and comprehensively planned facility provided the ROKA with an excellent training facility that became the pride of the Korean people. Among its features were heated classrooms, modern barracks and mess facilities. So taken with the facility and the national prestige it inspired, President Rhee dubbed it *Sang mu dae*, which translates to "Home of the Nation's Warriors."¹⁴⁸ The construction of the KATC was just one more piece of the puzzle, the solution of which would give the ROKA its own distinct identity and pride.

In 1952, the first ROKA Recruit Training Center on Cheju Do Island was already unequal to the task of housing, feeding and tending to the needs of the 15,000 new soldiers that in-processed there annually. When that population surged to 28,000 between August and December 1952, the deficiency became a crisis. In yet another example of Van Fleet's responsiveness to the needs of the ROKA, he increased the capacity of the First RTC and allocated enough resources to the problem to build a second RTC in Nonsan for training the combat support and combat service support branches.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Paik, *From Pusan*, 235

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 207

¹⁴⁹ Gibby, "Fighting in a Korean War," 208

Conclusion

As Alfred H. Hausrath writes, “The dramatic development of the Army of the Republic of Korea (ROKA) into a fighting force of 20 divisions with more than one-half million men from the shattered fragments that remained after the North Korean aggression of June 1950 is in large measure due to the efforts of KMAG.”¹⁵⁰ Certainly, the conditions on the ground in Korea in 1953 bear this out. The ROKA that defended the 38th Parallel following the signing of the ceasefire agreement at Panmunjom had fulfilled its second mandate. It was a force fully capable of defending itself and deterring the north from resuming hostilities. In fact, it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that it was the newfound strength and staying power of the ROKA that brought the North Koreans to the peace table, rather than any fear of US action.¹⁵¹ Over the course of 1953, the ROKA had routinely defeated attempts on the part of the NKPA and Communist Chinese Forces to expand their territory and to reduce vulnerabilities in their line. The ROKA demonstrated their resolve decisively during the Kumsong Offensive when an overwhelming Chinese force massed against ROKA forces in the strategically crucial Kumsong Salient. Despite taking enormous casualties and losing ground to the communists, the ROKA divisions maintained cohesion and even launched local counterattacks, preventing the enemy from penetrating deeply into the Eighth Army defenses to cause a catastrophic withdrawal – the communist’s operational objective.¹⁵² The assertion that the ROKA could defend its nation from North Korean aggression came under fire again in January 1968 when special operations units of the NKPA infiltrated

¹⁵⁰ Hausrath, *The KMAG Advisor*, 8

¹⁵¹ Hermes, *United States Army in Korea*, 499

¹⁵² Gibby, “Fighting in a Korean War,” 304-305

the demilitarized zone (DMZ) on the 38th Parallel and attacked South Korean command and control nodes. This event would mark the beginning of the Second Korean Conflict. After almost two years of low-intensity conflict along the DMZ, in which the North Korea attempted to subvert the South Korean government, the ROK still stood and the ROKA had proven itself yet again.¹⁵³

The reasons for this demonstrated success are firmly rooted in the contributions of KMAG. From the early efforts of PMAG under Captain James Hausman, through the reform program led by Cornelius Ryan, KMAG consistently kept the ROKA focused on fulfilling its responsibility to its republic. In the process, it helped turn it into South Korea's most respected governmental body and transformed its officer corps into a cadre of future political leaders. By addressing each of the components of the DOTMLPF holistically, KMAG avoided the hazards of imbalance between the generation of combat power and the means to support it. By making decisions with the long view in mind, such as pulling whole divisions out of the line to conduct collective training and refit, KMAG may have prolonged the conflict by reinforcing the stalemate and solidifying the partition of the two Koreas. Nevertheless, just as operational realities shaped overall US/South Korean strategy, so too did KMAG respond to them.

KMAG's greatest contribution, however, was also the product of expedience. Due to its own organizational limitations, KMAG placed an early and enduring emphasis on ROKA independence. This was no easy feat when the ROKA spent the entire war as a subordinate element of the US Eighth Army. Nevertheless, KMAG placed a constant emphasis on "koreanizing" doctrine and training POI, empowering ROKA officers to

¹⁵³ Daniel Bolger, "Scenes from an Unfinished War: Low-Intensity Conflict in Korea, 1966 – 1969" (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute, 1991), 116

make organizational improvements and to lead in training as well as in combat. Of equal importance was the constant push to eliminate unhealthy dependencies on the US for materiel and logistical support. This was a top-down and bottom-up effort that put as much pressure on President Rhee as it did on ROKA company commanders. A side effect of this approach was a strengthened South Korean economy and a national culture of self-determination.

Perhaps KMAG's most enduring legacy lies with the last two elements of the DOTMLPF: Personnel and Facilities. The close and constant interaction the KMAG's advisors had with ROKA officers and their soldiers had a profound influence on the kind of army it would become. KMAG's leaders identified early on the central importance of rapport building to the advisory effort. Since KMAG never had the manpower it needed to provide advisor coverage down to company-level and below, advisors were reliant on the rapport they built with senior leaders in their formal roles as mentors at regimental, division and corps-level to influence junior leaders in a positive direction.

The parallels between the ROKA of 1948-53 and the Afghan National Army (ANA) as it has existed from 2002 until the present day are sufficient to invite comparison. The United States built both organizations from the ground up and put them in the service of fledgling republics torn by insurgency and external threats. Neither army could look to a truly national military tradition for inspiration. In fact, what professionalism both did have in their ranks at their founding came from experience in the service of previous occupying nations: Japan in the case of Korea and the Soviet Union in the case of Afghanistan.

Advisors to the ANA face many of the same challenges as KMAG did. These include theft, corruption, illiteracy, cultural incongruities, mutinies and incompetent leadership to name just a few. KMAG did not overcome these challenges in the short term, nor has the advisory effort in Afghanistan. Experience has shown that security assistance missions need time to be successful. Indeed, without the crucible of war, it is highly plausible that it would have taken the ROKA a great deal more time to become an effective fighting force. By addressing training and organizational development concurrently with combat operations, KMAG created a real and distinctly Korean military culture even as it kept the enemy at bay. The Field Training Program initiated by Cornelius Ryan helped form the ROKA divisions into cohesive, well-trained teams by giving their commanders time and breathing space to train and to gain experience in garrison troop leading.

On 31 March 1960, President Rhee honored General (Retired) Van Fleet by unveiling a statue of him on the grounds of the Korean Military Academy. At the event, thousands of Koreans cheered him as a returning hero. During his remarks, in which he referred to Van Fleet as “The Father of the Korean Military Academy”, Rhee spoke of the efforts of Van Fleet and KMAG in glowing terms. “What happened” he said, “was a miracle that still exists, even today, in the Korean Army of seven hundred thousand men. It was the faith and confidence of General Van Fleet that created this great force and that has enabled our soldiers to fight for Korea and to guard the frontline of the Free World against further communist aggression.” The facts contained in Rhee’s words were as real and enduring, as was the statue that, in accepting his honor, Van Fleet said was “a symbol

of the battle morale and team spirit of men and women of many nations.”¹⁵⁴ Truly, there was no one more honored in this remark than the men of KMAG.

¹⁵⁴ Braim, *The Will to Win*, 348

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